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SUBJECT Klaus Barbie Update

FRANK REYNOLDS: Now we have more on the case of Klaus Barbie, the Nazi Gestapo chief in Lyon, France, who is now, at last, in French custody and facing trial for crimes committed during World War II.

John Martin has been following the trail of the American connection with Barbie and has new and disturbing information.

JOHN MARTIN: Earl Browning, a former Director of Plans and Operations for Army counterintelligence in Germany, says he ordered Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie arrested in Bavaria in 1947 when field agents attempted to recruit Barbie as an informant.

EARL BROWNING: We were shocked that CIC should be considering using him as an informant, the people in the field.

MARTIN: Browning recalled that Barbie's name and aliases appeared in this central registry of war criminals, that he was wanted for murder, and was one of only a handful of high-ranking Nazi criminals still at large.

BROWNING: If he were wanted as a criminal, he should be arrested, not be proposed for use as an informant.

MARTIN: What happened when you told that lower office to have him arrested?

BROWNING: We got the word that he had disappeared.

MARTIN: But two years later, according to this telegram, the State Department asked the American High Commis-

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sioner in Germany, John McCloy, why Barbie had not been turned over to French police, who had interrogated him in the presence of this U.S. intelligence agent, but who had not been permitted to take him away. Agent John Willms says the French agents were furious at Barbie.

JOHN WILLMS: They even said, "You'll never leave this room alive." And they swore at him and pounded the table and shook the chairs and made all kinds of commotion and threat. But he felt rather secure that he was in U.S. custody and that he wasn't going to be turned over to the French.

MARTIN: In this 1949 cable, High Commissioner McCloy told Washington he had no record of French requests for extradition. Mr. McCloy, who turned 88 years old last week, has told ABC News he doesn't recall anything about a Klaus Barbie or a Klaus Altman, doesn't recall any documents, doesn't recall this State Department telegram addressed to him as High Commissioner in Germany, and doesn't recall replying to the Secretary of State on November 23rd, 1949.

But one man who does admit remembering Barbie is Michel Thomas, a member of the French resistance, who says he was interrogated by Barbie and also later worked for the U.S. counterintelligence corps in Germany.

What was the policy?

MICHEL THOMAS: That automatic arrests were automatic arrests to be arrested and to be processed, and not to be released or protected.

MARTIN: It was fairly common practice to use former Nazis in intelligence work in Germany. Is that correct?

BROWNING: Yes, that's true. Yes. And we did that too. But not people with blood on their hands. We drew the line on that.

MARTIN: Somebody didn't draw the line. But investigators are still not convinced that Barbie's protectors came from another organization, and they want to know who thought Barbie was too valuable to pay for his crimes.